

Addressing an Alleged Hadith Contradiction: Which Was the Last Ayah to be Revealed?

by

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Argument:

The hadith literature contradicts itself regarding the last ayah to be revealed...

- Saheeh Bukhari Volume 6, Book 60, Hadith 67 - Ibn Abbas says the verse pertaining to Riba (i.e., 2:278).

- Saheeh Bukhari Volume 6, Book 60, Hadith 114 - Ibn Abbas says 4:93

- Saheeh Muslim, Book 11, Hadith 3939 - al-Baraa' says 4:176

Which one is the correct one?

Response:

First of all, we have to make it clear what a "contradiction" actually entails. A true contradiction in ahaadith could only occur when the ahaadith in question are mutually exclusive with the impossibility of them being all true. Is that the case here?

The answer is no because none of these ahaadith go back to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and are only reflections of the opinions of the companions,¹ and the companions could differ with each other.

However, one objection may be raised, and that is the fact that two different reports have been attributed to Ibn Abbas (i.e., him saying Surah 2:278 in Saheeh Bukhari Volume 6, Book 60, Hadith 67, but Surah 4:93 in Saheeh Bukhari Volume 6, Book 60, Hadith 114); however,

¹ Az-Zarqaani in his *Manahil al-'Irfan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* said:

اختلف العلماء في تعيين آخر ما نزل من القرآن على الإطلاق واستند كل منهم إلى آثار ليس فيها حديث مرفوع إلى النبي فكان هذا من دواعي الاشتباه وكثرة الخلاف على أقوال شتى .

Al-Qadi Abu Bakr al-Baqillani in his *al-Intisaar* said:

وهذه الأقوال ليس في شيء منها ما رفع إلى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم، ويجوز أن يكون قاله قائله بضرب من الاجتهاد وتغليب الظن، وليس العلم بذلك من فرائض الدين

responsible reading of the text highlights that no necessary contradiction actually exists. Let us take a look at the narration regarding 4:93:

Narrated Sa'id bin Jubair:

The people of Kufa disagreed (disputed) about the above Verse. So I went to Ibn 'Abbas and asked him about it. He said, "This Verse:-- "And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell." was revealed last of all and nothing abrogated it."

What is happening here? The people of Kufah differed regarding 4:93. When Ibn 'Abbas was approached regarding it, he said: "was revealed last of all and nothing abrogated it." It is very reasonable to explain Ibn Abbas's words as meaning that 4:93 was the last verse to be revealed concerning premeditated murder. This is because the context denotes that this was the topic of discussion among the Kufans. Secondly, Ibn Abbas emphasizes that this verse was not abrogated. That emphasis implies that Ibn Abbas was specifically talking about premeditated murder here and not that he thought that 4:93 was actually the last verse to be revealed from the entire Qur'an.

When we read the account of this incident in Saheeh Muslim, Book 43, Hadith 7173, this becomes much clearer:

Sa'id b. Jubair reported:

I said to Ibn Abbas: **Will the repentance of that person be accepted who kills a believer intentionally?** He said: No. I recited to him this verse of Sura al-Furqan (xix.): "And those who call not upon another god with Allah and slay not the soul which Allah has forbidden except in the cause of justice" to the end of the verse. **He said: This is a Meccan verse which has been abrogated by a verse revealed at Medina: "He who slays a believer intentionally, for him is the requital of Hell-Fire where he would abide for ever,"** and in the narration of Ibn Hisham (the words are): I recited to him this verse of Sura al-Furqan: "Except one who made repentance."

This narration completely supports the proposition that the context of Ibn Abbas's words is that he truly meant that 4:93 was the final verse to be revealed concerning the issue of premeditated murder.

We now turn to the hadith of al-Baraa' and 4:176:

Al-Baraa' (Allah be pleased with him) reported that the last verse revealed in the Holy Qur'an is:

"They ask thee for a religious verdict; say: Allah gives you a religious verdict about Kalala (the person who has neither parents nor children)"

But again, we see more clarification regarding what al-Baraa' truly meant in another narration from Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 18, Hadith 2882:

Narrated Al-Baraa' bin 'Azib:

The last verse revealed about the decease who left no descendants or ascendants: "They ask

thee for the legal decision. Say: Allah directs (thus) about those who leave no descendants or ascendants as heirs."

So again, here al-Bara' is specifically discussing what the last ayah was revealed in regards to this specific topic.

It would not even be ad-hoc and unreasonable to presume that Ibn Abbas even intended the same for the verse on Riba.

Hence, a very reasonable reconciliation between the statements of the companions is that they were not making a general claim regarding the last verse to be revealed from the entire Qur'an, but they were rather talking about the last verses to be revealed in regards to specific topics.²

Others tried to reconcile these narrations by arguing that all these verses were revealed last at the same time,³ though I do not personally see the need to resort to what might appear to be an ad-hoc explanation.

² Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani in his *Fathul Baari* said:

فَيَصْدُقُ أَنَّ كُلًّا مِنْهُمَا آخِرٌ بِالنِّسْبَةِ لِمَا عَدَاهُمَا

³ Imam as-Suyuti in his *Itqaan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* said:

ولا منافاة عندي بين هذه الروايات لأن الظاهر أنها نزلت دفعة واحدة كترتيبها في المصحف ولأنها قصة واحدة، فأخبر كل عن بعض ما نزل بأنه آخر.